

What is the 'great replacement theory'? A scholar of race relations explains

March 16 2024, by Rodney Coates



Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

The "[great replacement theory](#)," whose origins date back to the late 19th century, argues that Jews and some Western elites are conspiring to replace white Americans and Europeans with people of non-European

descent, particularly Asians and Africans.

The conspiracy evolved from a series of false ideas that, over time, stoked the fears of white people: In 1892, British-Australian author and politician Charles Pearson [warned that white people](#) would "wake to find ourselves elbowed and hustled, and perhaps even thrust aside by people whom we looked down." The massive influx of immigrants into Europe at the time fostered some of these fears and resulted in "white extinction anxiety." In the U.S., it resulted in policies [targeting immigration](#) in the late 19th and early 20th century.

In France, journalist Édouard Drumont, leader of an antisemitic movement, wrote articles in the late 19th century imagining how [Jews would destroy French culture](#). In 1909, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, an Italian poet and supporter of Benito Mussolini, argued that war and fascism [were the only cure for the world](#). [Fascism](#), then and now, worked to ensure white dominance.

This was followed by the [eugenics movement](#), an erroneous and racist theory that supported forced sterilization of Black people, the mentally ill and other marginalized groups, who were all deemed "unfit."

The 1978 book entitled "[The Turner Diaries](#)," a fictional futuristic account of the overthrow of the United States government, further contributed to white nationalist ideas.

Collectively, these gave rise to a global movement that attracted a wide range of [white supremacist, xenophobic and anti-immigration conspiracy theories](#). These theories were formally codified [in the work of Frenchman Renaud Camus](#), first in his 2010 book "L'Abécédaire de l'innocence" and elaborated in his 2011 book "[Le Grand Remplacement](#)."

Camus argued that ethnic French and white Europeans were being replaced physically, culturally and politically by nonwhite people. He believed that liberal immigration policies and the dramatic decline in white birth rates were threatening European civilization and traditions.

Why this conspiracy theory matters

These false ideas promulgated the spread of white supremacy, which has [contributed to terrorist attacks](#), state violence and propaganda campaigns in the U.S and parts of Europe.

On Aug. 11, 2017, during a "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, [white nationalists chanted](#) "You will not replace us" and "[Jews will not replace us](#)." In spring 2019, Belgian politician Dries Van Langenhove repeatedly posted on social media, "[We are being replaced](#)."

In recent years, [nonwhite immigrants](#) have been the target of xenophobia. Migrants, especially from Mexico, are accused of [bringing criminal activities](#) to American cities. Immigrants have also been falsely accused of [smuggling fentanyl](#) into the U.S. The reality is that immigrants commit [far fewer crimes than those born in the U.S.](#)

Impact of the theory and spread of hate

In less than two decades, the theory has become a major idea, with as many [as 60% of the French population](#) believing some aspects of it. According to that survey, they are worried or at least concerned that they might be replaced. In the U.K. [and the U.S.](#), close to [one-third of those polled](#) believe that white people are systematically being replaced by nonwhite immigrants. Some in the U.S. fear that America might lose its culture and identity as a result.

Being aware of [conspiracy theories](#) and standing up to hatred, I argue, can help societies deal with the continuing fallout of extreme xenophobia, racist rants, the rise of white supremacy and the victimization of innocent people.

This article is republished from [The Conversation](#) under a Creative Commons license. Read the [original article](#).

Provided by The Conversation

Citation: What is the 'great replacement theory'? A scholar of race relations explains (2024, March 16) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2024-03-great-theory-scholar.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.